



Indian Political Science Association

POLICE IN ANCIENT INDIA

Author(s): Anupam Sharma

Source: *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 65, No. 1 (Jan.-March, 2004), pp. 101-110

Published by: [Indian Political Science Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41855800>

Accessed: 24/06/2014 23:35

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

<https://fruit-chat.com/>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Indian Political Science Association is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Indian Journal of Political Science*.

<http://www.jstor.org>



The Quarterly Indian Journal of Political Science
Vol. 65, No.1, Jan.-March, 2004

POLICE IN ANCIENT INDIA

Anupam Sharma

The concept of rule of law and the administration of justice has been known to exist in India ever since the vedas came to be recognised as they were synthesis of Drame. Maintenance of law and order prevention and detention of crime in the society is the prime responsibility of police since ancient times so that selfish elements may not suppress and exploit the weak and harmony could be maintained in the society. The prime characteristics of ancient police system was its community orientation, functional specialisation, decentralisation and expertization. To a great extent the accountability of police force was towards the masses.

Conceptually, the word 'police' has been derived from the Greek word 'Polis' that is a city. The Latin 'Politeia' which means conditions of a state or government. However, in administrative terminology police is being considered as an executive civil force of a state to which is entrusted the duty of maintenance of public order and enforcing regulations for prevention and detention of crime. Succinctly, it may be said that the police came in existence in society with the existence of man. The term 'Police' according to the Oxford dictionary means "a system of regulation for the preservation of order and the enforcement of law". According to the Royal Commission on Police Powers and Procedure 1929, a Policeman is a person paid to perform, as a matter of duty, acts, which, if he were so minded, he might have done voluntarily.

The concept of rule of law and the administration of justice has been known to exist in India ever since the Vedas came to be recognized as they were synthesis of Dhrama. The concept of crime was there. Manu classified crimes fewer than eighteen heads amongst which, were included assault, defamation, theft, robbery, adultery, violence, gambling and betting. Manu refers to the police function prevalent in his times for the prevention and detention of crime. According to P.V. Kane, the police problems of the most ancient village communities of India were confirmed mainly to cattle theft, murder and adultery.

The police problems of the most ancient village communities of India were confined mainly to cattle theft, murder and adultery. Balmiki's Ramayana furnishes glimpses of policemen on patrol security, guards and spies. The Apasthamba Dharmasatra (600-300 BC)

prescribes that the king should appoint in towns and villages officers and subordinates, who are pure and truthful for the protection of the subjects against thieves and who are to be made to make good what is stolen, that is, 'if the king does not punish the guilty, he incurs sin', that, in disputes judges should be men of learning, clever and fulfilling their duties, and that "witnesses were to tell the truth".

In the Bhagvadgita the good qualities ascribed to a gentleman can very well be fixed for a policeman.

अभयं सत्त्वसंयुद्धिर्ज्ञानं योगव्यवस्थितिः।

दानं दमश्च यज्ञश्च स्वाध्यायस्तप आर्जवम् ॥१॥

अहिंसा सत्यमक्रोधत्यागः क्षन्तिरपैषुनमः।

दया भूतेष्वलोलुप्त्वं मार्दवं हीरचापलम् ॥२॥

तेज क्षमा धर्षतिः शौचमद्रोहो नातिमानिता।

भवन्ति संपदं दैवीमभिजातस्य भारत॥३॥

(Bhagvadgita – Ch. XVI-1,2,3)

"Fearlessness, purity of mind, wise apportionment of knowledge and concentration, charity, self control and sacrifice, study of the scriptures, austerity and uprightness.

"Non-violence, truth, freedom from anger, renunciation, tranquillity, aversion to fault findings, compassion to living beings, freedom from covetousness gentleness, modesty and steadiness (absence of fickleness)".

"Vigour, forgiveness, fortitude, purity, freedom from malice and excessive pride-these, Pandaava (Arjuna), are the endowments of him who is born in the divine nature".

Mauryan Period

If we take Mauryan administrative system into consideration it may be evident that Mauryan empire was truly a Police State. The entire system was bifurcated in Pranta, now known as Province, Pradesh known as commissioners, Vishaya known as district, Nagar as cities and Gram as village. The head of such district used to be known as



Vishayapati. He was responsible to maintain peace while preventing and detecting crimes in the district. The district further divisible in sthaniya, generally constituted on 800 villages and functioning under the charge of an officer known as Sthanic. Sthaniya was further divided in the administrative units of Kharvatik, Dronmukh and Sangrahan, Gop was the officer at this stage and responsibility was to maintain law and order in his area of operation. The village head-man known as Gramini was responsible for the police activities in the village. He used to discharge his duties with the help of village community. Thus at the grassroot level, in those days a collective policing was in operation. Each officer was accountable to his superior one and thus he used to report about the problems to his senior officers who were supposed to take proper action. Apart from this general police structure the special police with a functional specialization was also operative. For instance, officer like Chaur Rajjuka and Vivitadhyaksha were considered to be an expert in apprehending thieves. The officer may be considered as predecessor to present times C.I.D. Briefly, this was the district police organization. In the district generally a few towns were also functional which had a different police organization. Normally the cities or towns used to be set-up for strategic and economic reasons and they used to be called according to their nature. For instance, if a city had a fort it used to be known as Durg Nagar. Similarly, a river town may be called as 'pattan' and a general town as Sthaniya. The chief of the town police was known as Nagaradhyaksha or Nagarik. He may be considered as the counterpart to the commissioner of police of the present days.

The duties of the Nagarikas who later on came to be known as Kotwal, have been defined in detail by Kautilya. As per contemporary municipal laws, masters of houses were to report the arrival or departure of strangers and way-fairers and catch hold of persons of doubtful characters and possessed of destructive weapons. Suspicious persons were to be arrested and punished. Even persons throwing dirt on the street were to be punished. The Nagarikas were expected to maintain law and order and look after the administration of jails and check up daily the defence of the city. He took custody of the lost property. Elaborate arrangements were made for the protection of the fire. The detailed duties of Nagarikas were thus described by Kautilya "persons whose family subsist on slender means of inheritance, who have little or no comfort, who frequently change their residence, caste and the names

not only of themselves but also of their family (Gotra), who conceal their own avocations and calls, who have been taken themselves to such luxurious modes of life as eating flesh and condiments, drinking liquor, wearing flower garlands, fine dress and jewels, who have been squandering away their money, who constantly move with profligate women, gamblers, or virtues, who frequently leave their residence... who hold secret meeting in lonely places near to, or far from, their residence, who hurry as to get their wounds or boils cured..... these and other persons may be suspected to be either murderers or robbers or offenders guilty of misappropriation of treasure trove or deposits or to be any other kind of subsisting by foul means secretly employed.

The entire city used to be divided into four parts, each part being headed by an officer known as Sthanik, a counter part to the present superintendent of police. On a unit of 10 to 40 houses there used to be an officer known as Gop and his duty was not only to provide security to the residents but also keep a close eye on their activities. Guards known as Rakshak used to patrol the lane and bi-lane of the city and city and stationed at Chatushakhas (Chaukies) and Gulm (Gumaties). In nutshell this was the organizational structure of police at district level during Mauryan times.

Kautilya in his Arthashastra, has described at length, nine groups of spies who were utilized for exercising watch on different kinds of people, including government officials, citizens, thieves, adulterators, criminals, forgers, coiners assassins and poisoners. But they had limited powers to exercise of arms. At the time of the Maurya rulers, there were courts of judges (Dharma Sthanika) and police Magistrates (Kantaksodhana). The criminal law was severe and stringent. The defender of the citadel was known as kotpala and protection of city as Nagarpala. The present work kotwal and kotwali have been drafted from kotpal of ancient times.

The Sanskrit word 'Gulma' became Gumma in Prakrit, and then it was extended with an affix to give our modern word Gumti which is still in use to mean round towers to observe movement of people and goods from the work chatushka, the modern chowki and chowkidar has been derived. Likewise, one prahara or duty period, and the word 'Pahra' meant 'watchman' with a fixed duty', the contemporary word 'Pahra' had probably been derived from this. At that time, policemen



were on duty for three hours at a time.

The gramini was remunerated in cash and was assisted by any informal council of village elders. He is not mentioned as being generally responsible for the police duties of the village but had the power to expel from the village. Thieves and adulterers try some minor offences and impose fines in certain cases. In the areas inter-vening between villages, there were Vivitadhyakshas who inquired into the whereabouts of passersby, checked passports and protected travelers from thieves, dacoits and wild animals. They had hunters and guards accompanied by dogs to watch the approach of thieves or gangs of outlaws, and issued warnings of dangers to villagers through men on horse-back, beat of drum, blowing of conches, carrier or by means of a series of bearer fires. At the ferries there were Navadhyakshas to check the passports of travelers and to arrest suspects.

Police Officials in Ancient India:

From contemporary inscriptions and literature, we came across the names of many officials of various designations. Though exact designation, functions and nature of duty is not clear, however, it can be assumed that these officials occupied posts of different status, authority and responsibility in the administrative hierarchy of the police department. Some of these officials have been thus described.

GRAMINI	:	Village Pradhan
CORAGRAHA	:	He was probably a thief catcher
RAKSINAH	:	Constable
CORARAJJUKA	:	He was an officer who arrested robbers and fettered them.
CHURDHARANIKA	:	He was officer incharge of recovered stolen property and held charge of ten types of criminal activities.
DANDANYAKA	:	He was a police officer who held the fetters or noose of punishment.
DANDANYAKA	:	He was a police officer who



		held the fetters or noose of punishment.
DANDAPASIKA	:	He was a police officer who held the fetters or noose of punishment.
DASAPARADHIKA	:	It was probably the designation of a class of officers who were incharge of ten specified kinds of criminal offences as Aparadhas.
DANDAQUHIPARIN	:	He was Chief of Police
ARAKSIKA	:	He was a watchman
GATA-BHATA	:	They were perhaps officials incharge of the investigation of crimes.
RAJASTHANIYA	:	Is an expressive whose actual function is almost vague.
NAGARIKA	:	He was Chief of Police.
DANDASAKTI	:	He was also a Police Officer.
MAHAPRATI HAR	:	He was the chief of door keepers.
KHOLA	:	He was incharge of intelligence department.
GUDHAPURUSHA	:	He was a secret service man.
CARA	:	He was a simple spy.
MAHADANDANAYAKA	:	He was a high ranking official.
PRAHARPALA	:	The policemen were on duty for three hours which was known as prahar, therefore, who did watch duty for a fixed period and known as praharpala.



Besides these prominent police officers whose prime concern was to control law and order and prevent offences, there were many other police functionaries whose role changed from time to time.

There were courts of judges (Dharmasthia) and police magistrates or prosecutors (Kantaksodhana) to entertain cases of crimes based on the sacred law and Royal ordinances respectively in the later courts.

Police During The Age of Gupta's:

During Gupta's empire the police existed as a separate organisation albeit in an elementary form, is confirmed by Visakhdutta's Mudrarakshasha. Fa Hein has given a glorious account of peaceful law and order situation during the reign of Guptas. In his famous work 'Daskumaschaita' Dandin throws welcome light on the activities of police department in urban areas. Watchman usually wandered about the town either on their routine rounds or in search of thieves. They kept watch on roads and highways with trenchans (Danda) in their hands. Even ladies of suspicious movements were seized by them while on duty. Police was posted at all important places and guardmen were ever alert to detect criminals. Much of the police control was conducted through spies (Gudhapurusas or Caras).

Police During The Age Of Feudalism:

After the fall of Guptas, India was divided into various smaller kingdoms which were continuously engaged in incessant policy of expansion and aggrandisement against one another. In this context Kalhana's 'Rajtarangini' provides us an insight about the working of police in some north Indian states, particularly Kashmir. Kalhana records that Kashmir was free from the depredations of robbers and thieves because of Hariraja (1028 AD). "He whose orders were never infringed cleared the land of thieves and prohibited the closing of doors in the market street at night" Through the travelers tales inscription and other literary accounts we came to know that the system and conditions of law and order continued to remain satisfactory during the reign of Harsha in north and Pulkeshin in the south.

Police Administration in South India:

In contrast to the earlier Hindu kingdoms, the organisation of

the police received considerable attention in the medieval Vijaynagar Empire. There was royal police and people's police. The duties of the police have been defined by the Abdul Razzak as "to acquaint themselves with all the events and accidents that happen within the seven walls and recover everything that is lost, or that may be abstracted by theft, otherwise they are fined". The system of penalising police officials for the anti-social behaviour is confirmed by the Nuniz. The system was extended even to the prefect who can be identified with the Police Commissioner in the modern times. In the provinces the Nayakas who were responsible for the reservation of order in their jurisdiction appointed Kavalghars generally drawn from the criminal tribes to prevent thefts from their castemen. They appointed in turn Teliyaris who were liable to be punished if they did not discharge their duties properly.

In south India police was committed to the people. Police had the clear power to control the anti social elements. The officers were appointed for different posts like law and order, prevent of crimes and punish the law breakers. In this period police has given more attention.

The main function of police in ancient time was to maintain law and order in society and preventing and detecting of crime. The prime characteristics of ancient police system was that the police was more community oriented. Gamind was used to discharge his duties with the help of village community. There was functional specialization also. Police organisation were divided in various department and they performed their duties in their department with expertise. For instance Chaur Rajjuka and Vivitardhyaksha were considered to be an expert in apprehending thieves. Police was more decentralised in their function. Damdagtipanin was chief of the police who observed the whole police department. Dendasakti was a police officer while Gramini was the village pradhan. Each officer was accountable to his superior one and thus he used to report about the problems to his senior officers, who were supposed to take proper action.

Reference :

Bayley, Dawid H. 'Police and Political Development in India', Princeton University Press, New Hersey, 1969.

Bowers, Stuart 'The Police and Civil Liberties', London, 1966.



Chatterjee, S.K. The Police in Ancient India vide 'the Indian Police Journal, Centenary Issue', Delhi, 1961, P. 11.

Curry, J.C. 'The Indian Police' Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2002.

Curry, J.C. 'The Indian Police' Faber & Faber Limited, MCM XXXII, London, 1932.

Das, Sukla, "Crime and Punishment in Ancient India' Abhinav Publications, New Delhi.

German, A.C., Day, F.D. & Gallati, R.R.J. – 'Introduction to law Enforcement' Springfield. Illinois USA, 1962.

Gupta, A.S. 'Crime in India (Up to 1861)' Sahitya Bhawan, Hospital Road, Agra.

Kane, P.V. 'History of Dharmashastras', Vol. III, P. 1-2.

Ibid, III, P. 153-154.

Khera, S.S. 'District Administration in India', Asia Publishing House, New Delhi, 1996.

Madan, J.C. 'Indian Police' Uppal Publishing House, New Delhi, 1980.

Mathur, K.M. 'Indian Police – Role and Challenges' Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 1994.

Mishra, K.K. 'Police Administration in Ancient India' Mittal Publications, Delhi, 1987.

Mullick, B.N. 'A Philosophy for the Police'. 1969.

Shah, G.R. 'Image Makers An Attitudinal Study of Indian Police' Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1993.

Shah, G.R. 'Indian Police – Retrospect' Cosmo Publication, New Delhi, 1989.

Shamshastry-Kautilya Arthasastra.

Singh, Joginder 'Inside Indian Police' Manu Publications, New Delhi, 2002.



Srivastava, V.P. (ed.) 'Indian Police: Law and Order Reality'
Manas Publication, New Delhi, 1977.

Sullivan, J.L. Introduction to Police Science, 1966.

Vadackumchery, J. 'Policing the Police A Nation's Cry' Kaveri
Books, 2003.

<https://fruit-chat.com/>